

INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION

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TRAINING CITY EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

What are the basic elements of in-service training in public relations? Which training methods and tools are best suited for municipal employees?

The city as an institution does not make a definite impression upon most citizens. It is not until the citizen meets this institution through its employees or its services that the city becomes a reality. Often this meeting is by citizen-employee contact through paying tax bills, seeking information on zoning changes, asking about a water bill, or in some other way registering a complaint or seeking a city government service. Sometimes these contacts are made face to face, other times through the telephone. It is at these numerous points of meeting that the bulk of the citizens are likely to react favorably or unfavorably towards the city government, and this in turn helps determine the city government's public relations.

It is the purpose of this report to suggest ways in which the city can further its public relations program by in-service training of its employees. Public relations training is but a single phase of the total job of training employees to keep them abreast of their jobs and at peak efficiency. Where possible public relations training should be an integral part of all on-the-job training. Where a city has not given recognition to public relations training, however, it is necessary as a first step to provide a separate and distinct training program for many employees. With this foundation established, subsequent orientation and in-service training can consider public relations as a part of the larger job of training the employee.

This report is based in part on extensive public relations training programs that have been developed and carried through in Jackson, Mich., Norfolk, Va., and Beverly Hills, Calif.

Who Shall Be Trained?

All city employees should be brought into the public relations training program, but in the initial effort discussed in this report it is better to limit the training to department heads and other supervisory and public contact employees who more often represent the city government to the public.

The employees to be trained initially should be selected on the basis of an analysis of the public relations and supervisory aspects of all city jobs. Most, if not all, department heads should receive this training so that they in turn can carry on the work with their subordinates. The other major group will include those employees who have the largest number of personal or telephone contacts with citizens--counter clerks, refuse collection crews, fire inspectors, switchboard operators, and others.

Selection of Training Personnel

Ultimately department heads must be held responsible for public relations training with supervisory employees taking immediate responsibility. In smaller cities, department heads must take on the work themselves. It is the supervisor, whatever his title may be, who must observe and correct the faults of the counter clerk in handling complaints; who must suggest better ways for the policeman to deal with traffic violators; who must tactfully suggest better ways for the engineer to explain the whys and wherefores of the zoning ordinance.

Some other way must be found, however, for the initial stages discussed in this report. The assignment should be in the personnel department for those cities fortunate enough to have one or more professional personnel employees. Many cities will find it necessary to call upon outside help--perhaps a public school teacher or an instructor from a local or nearby college, perhaps an executive with the electric power or telephone company who has had experience in personnel and public relations training, perhaps the city manager or a well qualified city department head. The person selected should have some knowledge of the city government and of the specific work done by the trainees, the ability to organize and conduct group sessions, and preferably some experience as a manager or trainer of others.

Time and Place of Training

For seven or eight to 15 training sessions may be needed depending on the subjects covered, the time taken for each meeting and the specific public relations activities of the group being trained. Sessions should be from one to two hours in length depending on how much use is made of films, demonstrations, slides, and lectures. One hour is sufficient where any session consists solely of discussion and lectures. Sessions should be held once or twice a week and should be entirely on city time. Twelve to 15 employees is the best number for a discussion group.

A regular meeting room should be set aside, and it should be conducive to quiet, uninterrupted discussion. Lighting, ventilation, chairs, tables, pads, pencils, and other arrangements always should be checked carefully before any session begins.

Subject Matter of Public Relations Training

The training programs in Norfolk, Va., Beverly Hills, Calif., and Jackson, Mich., vary somewhat in content and emphasis, but five subjects are common to all three programs.

First is the subject of "know your government" dealing with the city government in relation to the community, the community's public and private resources, the principal activities of city departments and agencies, the historical background of the city, and a few pertinent statistics about the city.

Second is the matter of dealing first-hand with the public in answering inquiries and handling complaints. These sessions stress listening to the citizen with reasonable interest and understanding and giving reasons and relaying information in clear, simple language. The various publics the employees must deal with are described. The Beverly Hills program classified 14 types of citizens that could be encountered on the basis of personality including Silent Sam, Disagreeable Dan, High-Hat Hanna, Talkative Tom, and Confused Carol.

To quote from the Beverly Hills manual the employee in talking to Deliberate Dorothy is admonished to "take your time with her. Repeat your thoughts from various angles. Don't try to rush a decision. Maintain an attitude of sincere interest or concern in her problem."

The third subject is use of the telephone--how to speak courteously and politely, how to handle incoming and outgoing calls, how to transfer calls, and other aspects of good telephone usage. The local telephone company is always available to help in this kind of training in any city.

The fourth subject is personal appearance, clothing, habits of speech, good diction, and the avoidance of personal mannerisms or habits that might be objectionable.

Finally, these training sessions deal with employee attitudes and interests, especially a sincere interest in the problems of citizens.

A number of special subjects might be included in the training program, depending upon the groups of employees. Policemen need special training in handling traffic; firemen need special training if they are conducting a home inspection program for fire prevention; some employees will need training in writing letters; building, plumbing, and electrical inspectors need training in calling attention to ordinance violations in a way that maintains authority, secures compliance, and yet does not give offense to the citizen.

The subject matter of public relations training can be illustrated further by reference to the courses conducted in three cities.

Jackson Michigan. This city held a public relations training program several years ago for 50 public contact employees divided into three groups: supervisors and employees in key positions; senior clerks, senior cashiers and other public contact employees; and a third group of new employees and junior clerks. The training was conducted by the secretary to the civil service commission, and each group held 14 one-hour sessions on city time.

The first session on public contacts centered around the factors which influence public attitudes toward the city government. In rank order these factors were physical service, personal service, rates or prices, publicity, appearance of buildings and equipment, and financial success. Personal service was stressed as the factor that public contact employees could most fully control. The elements of personal service (interest, information, speech, politeness, and appearance) were examined and appraised.

Another discussion dealt with the quality and quantity of information given to the public. It was agreed that the public is entitled to full and accurate information on all matters pertaining to their government. Since it is impossible for any one person to know all the answers however, city employees should make an effort to learn where various kinds of information can be found. To aid employees in this matter, a member of each department reported on the principal activities, major problems and issues confronting his department, and how the work ties in with the other departments. Field trips were made to the water department, sewage treatment plant, public works, and the airport. Brief talks were made by key employees in the police and fire departments, the city manager, the city engineer, and the director of public works.

In discussing how to handle complaints the groups decided that it was necessary to deal with many "publics" in connection with complaints, all varying in interests. A careful analysis should be made of all these "publics" and their attitudes to determine what they want their city government to do and how they want it done. Some of these "publics" are taxpayers, business and industrial groups,

school children and their parents, church groups, labor organizations, relief clients, operators of amusement centers, racial groups, applicants for city jobs, financial houses, vendors, and utility consumers.

Since the citizen is affected by what he sees as well as what he hears, considerable time was spent on the personal appearance of the city employees and the physical appearance of the building, grounds, and equipment. The groups considered the problem of what constitutes the appropriate clothing and grooming for men and women employees. It was agreed that untidy employees, and dirty unrepaired city buildings and equipment suggest that the city administration is low in efficiency and lacking in self respect.

A session on speech made use of a list of 60 commonly mispronounced words. Correct pronunciation of each word was asked for by the discussion leader and the correct one eventually indicated. Avoiding the use of slurred words, dropped syllables, and slang was also emphasized.

Another session revealed the fact that before good public relations can be established a high morale within the municipal service must be built and maintained. The attitude of employees toward their work and their loyalty to their organization is conditioned to a large degree by the recognition they receive from superior officers for work well done.

Beverly Hills, California, had completed training for 130 city employees by the end of 1954 with groups averaging from 10 to 15 employees each. The training sessions have been conducted by staff from the administrative office of the city, using a training manual developed by the administrative assistant to the city manager. Each course has been organized on the basis of seven sessions of two hours each with the classes meeting at weekly intervals. All training has been done on city time.

The first session for Beverly Hills employees was devoted to general information, history, and organization and functions of the city, and public relations responsibilities. The latter involves discovering the full meaning of the term public relations, its benefits, and the factors involved in all public contact situations.

Examples of good and bad public relations were discussed at the second session and a movie on that subject, "By Jupiter," was shown. The third meeting was concerned with the various "publics" that city employees must deal with. A list was drawn up of the possible problems which city employees might encounter in their contacts with the public together with some possible techniques which have been used successfully.

"The telephone and public relations" was the subject of the fourth session. Instructions in the mechanics of using the telephone properly were given, and a movie on "Telephone Courtesy" pointed out over 20 techniques and habits which can help the employee "look" good to the person on the other end of the line.

Beverly Hills also included a session on safety and its connection with public relations. The handling of city vehicles was stressed, but the discussion also was concerned with doing things "the safe way" in the shop and the office so as to build the impression of a safe and efficient organization.

The problem of attitudes, or the readiness to react in a characteristic way to a particular person or situation, was the topic of the sixth session. Included

were sections on characteristics of attitudes, how attitudes develop, and changing and developing attitudes. As an example of some way of working with citizen attitudes, correct techniques in the art of correspondence were discussed.

The last session was used to summarize the previous six meetings. Of particular value in the summary was a list of ways to influence people favorably--not only on the job but also in private affairs. This list includes: (1) Avoid arguments. Nobody wins an argument. (2) Respect the other fellow's opinion. Be sympathetic with his ideas and desires. Try to honestly see his point of view. Talk with him in terms of his interests. (3) Let the other person do a great deal of talking. Be a good listener. (4) Be friendly, especially start any conversation in a friendly manner. Remember the importance of first impressions. (5) Don't be afraid to use a smile. (6) Let the other person feel that an idea is his own even if you planted the seed of the idea in his mind. (7) Dramatize your own ideas where possible to help get acceptance by the other person. (8) Appeal to the other person's nobler motives. (9) Deliver on any promises you make. Be punctual for appointments. (10) Remember that a person's name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in the language. (11) Train yourself to become genuinely interested in other people.

Among Beverly Hills plans for the immediate future is the development of an indoctrination program in public relations for new employees to be given once every two months and to take about four hours--on city time.

Norfolk, Virginia. This city is completing a training program for six groups of 15 employees each with selection made of those employees who have the most contact with the public. The training program has been conducted under contract with the Public Relations Institute, a private public relations firm in Norfolk. The sessions were organized by the conference or discussion method. Ten sessions of one hour each have been used to cover the subjects of the city government in relation to the community, public relations in general, complaints, telephone techniques, communications, personal appearance, press relations, public speaking, and employee attributes.

The session on employee attributes developed the thought that good personnel relations will bring good public relations attitudes and are, in fact, a part of the public relations program. At the session on public relations projects, various participants in the groups presented problems that they had encountered of a public relations nature, and employees discussed ways and means of meeting such situations.

Training Methods

The preceding summary has described the subject matter of public relations training for three different cities. Subsequent sections of this report discuss the training methods available to city officials and some of the tools that are useful for a training program. The training methods include lectures, class room instruction, the conference method, and demonstrations.

Lectures. This method places almost all the emphasis on the speaker with the employee taking a passive part in the learning process. Lectures often are of little value since such training is more or less imposed upon the employee, and the appeal is largely emotional and second hand and may not last more than a few days.

Lectures do have a place when used judiciously. For example, a joint session might be desirable for a subject of general interest such as "Know Your City

Government." This session could stress the service concept of government--the idea that citizens are entitled to the same good service from the city that they would get from the telephone company or any other well run organization. An inspirational talk can help to inculcate an employee attitude of service. Following this general session employees could be divided into smaller discussion groups to consider specific topics.

There may also be a few occasions when an outside authority on some public relations subject can be secured for a single meeting only, and the lecture is the way to reach the largest group. Lectures, if used, are better when accompanied by demonstrations, films, and other techniques to keep audience interest at as high a peak as possible.

Class Room Instruction. This method of training with recitations, homework, and other paraphernalia is of little or no use. The trainees do not think of themselves as pupils in the school system, and they will not accept on faith the statements of a teacher who may have had less experience than they have had. The employees collectively have much to contribute as well as to learn about public relations.

The Conference Method. This training method comes closest to being fully effective for most employees. Under this method employees are expected to supply at least a part of the training themselves by self-analysis and by comparing their experience with that of other employees.

This method is by no means the easiest. It involves a series of sessions in which a number of experienced individuals guided by a conference leader pool their experience, knowledge, and thinking to reach better solutions of their problems than they would be likely to reach as individuals. Unlike other training methods the conference does not draw upon a teacher to supply an answer but rather draws the answers, under leadership, from the group itself.

Take for example a conference on the handling of citizen complaints. The first step might be to determine what types of complaints are most common. The participating employees can compile a check list to ascertain the most frequent types of complaints, then the participants in the group can be asked to volunteer what they think is the best way of handling each of the complaints listed. Other members of the group, if it is properly conducted, are bound to disagree or to offer modifications, and the net result will be a solution probably better than that offered by any single employee.

Useful suggestions on organizing and conducting training by the conference method are contained in three pamphlets of the International City Managers' Association entitled "Management Training," "Conference Method Training," and "The Conference Leader's Job." Although these guides are designed principally for management training there are many useful suggestions for public relations training as well.

Demonstrations. Lectures and conference or group discussions can be made more effective if accompanied by some demonstration, skit, or dramatization. A demonstration that has value is that of a citizen-employee contact at a public counter. The dramatization can be presented by members of the group and show examples of bad technique on the part of the employee.

The presentation should be short (three to five minutes) and should be rated or evaluated by each member of the group independently. The rating or evaluations

can then be pooled to stimulate discussion on the good and bad points of the presentation. The process of rating or evaluation stimulates participation and thoughtful discussion by the entire group. Used properly demonstrations thus encourage employee participation and stimulate efforts towards improvements in public relations methods.

Training Tools

The tools which can be used to facilitate training by the conference method include pamphlets, books and other printed references, movies and slides, and maps, charts, and similar items.

Printed Material. This includes text books, manuals, and pamphlets, but for public relations training these materials should be confined to brief, simply written statements of public relations methods and objectives. Some cities have found it useful to issue public relations handbooks or manuals as a general guide for city employees. These and other materials which may be helpful in organizing the training program are listed at the end of this report.

Movies and Slides. These will usually meet with a good reception and always will attract attention. While no film or slide is a complete training device, it can be used to introduce, reinforce, and supplement what the discussion leader or the group has to say. Training films should be selected to fill a definite need in the public relations training course. This means they should be previewed before use.

The discussion leader should brief the group on the purpose for which the film is being used and should point out the principals and practices to look for. A discussion of the points illustrated in the film always should follow the showing. When so used films can give emphasis and make abstract principals more realistic and meaningful to the employee. MIS Report No. 101, "Use of Films in City Government," describes the ways in which films can be used in employee training and lists a number of films that are available for specific public relations training.

Maps, Charts, and Other Tools. Posters, maps, charts, and other materials can be used as visual aids to liven up the training program and to illustrate specific points for each session. They enable members of the group to keep track of the discussion and help the discussion leader in directing the discussion. Some suggestions on the construction, use, and limitations of various types of visual aids are contained in the comprehensive book, "Visual Aids for the Public Service," which is listed in the bibliography below.

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Selected Bibliography on Public Relations Training

- City Hall Manners in Dealing with the Public. City of Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. 20pp. (Ideas from an in-service training program placed in booklet form to aid city employees.)
- The Easy Way to Sell Service to the Public. City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1954. 18pp. (Suggestions on how to promote good-will as a public employee.)
- Employee Training. By Alfred M. Cooper. McGraw-Hill Book Co. Inc., New York. 1942. 311pp. (Chapter VII has a good discussion of public relations training, and Appendix B describes eight possible types of sessions for a public relations training program.)
- Employee Training Program--Public Relations in the Public Service. City of Columbia, Missouri. 1951. 13pp. (Mimeographed copy of a paper read and discussed at a police training school--remarks apply to all departments, however.)
- Human Relations Course for Foremen and Supervisors--A Leader's Manual. City of Jackson, Michigan. (This and other training aids were used to help supervisors in a program held for the first time in 1949.)
- Management Training Guide for Cities: (1) Management Training--Your Responsibility. 15pp. (2) Conference Method Training in Management. 12pp. (3) The Conference Leader's Job in Management Training. 13pp. International City Managers' Association, 1313 East 60 Street, Chicago 37. 1950. 50 cents each; all three for \$1. (These pamphlets discuss methods of determining the training need, how to organize and conduct conference discussions, and how to check results.)
- "Municipal 'Charm School.'" By Michael Costello. National Municipal Review, May, 1954, pp. 230-234. (Article on how Milwaukee teaches its public servants to get along with their bosses, the taxpayers, during the day's work.)
- Municipal Public Relations. By Elton D. Woolpert. International City Managers' Association, 1313 East 60 Street, Chicago 37. 1950. 50pp. \$2. (Program for improving public relations, with review of practices which have been tested and approved. Among subjects covered are best ways of handling complaints; employee contacts with citizens; reporting and publicity; personnel practices.)
- The Police and the Public. By Richard L. Holcomb. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 301-27 East Lawrence Avenue, Springfield, Illinois. 1954. 36pp. \$1. (Is of value both to the administrator and the individual officer because the reasons for following proper procedures in dealing with people are clearly explained.)

- Public Relations for Government Employees: An Action Program. By Eleanor S. Ruhl. Civil Service Assembly, 1313 East 60 Street, Chicago 37. 1952. 32pp. \$2. (Presents the role of public relations and some of its techniques. Also has excellent bibliography of books, pamphlets, and articles on public relations programs.)
- Public Relations Handbook. City of Two Rivers, Wisconsin. 7pp. (A short guide on handling phone calls, complaints, inquiries, and visitors.)
- Public Relations Manual for Fire Departments. National Fire Protection Association, 60 Batterymarch Street, Boston 10. 1947. 30pp. \$1.
- Public Relations Training Manual. City of Beverly Hills, California. 1954. 27pp. (Parts of the manual were used in preparing this report.)
- Rocks in the Roadway. By Dan Hollingsworth. Available from National Association of Automotive Mutual Insurance Companies, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago 6. 1954. 51pp. (A treatise on police public relations by a former police officer.)
- Visual Aids for the Public Service. By Rachel Marshall Goetz. Public Administration Service, 1313 East 60 Street, Chicago 37. 1954. 89pp. \$3.25. (Explains the use of such tools as displays, graphics, and films. Also lists many further sources of materials.)

